



STOP SMOKING FOR BETTER HEALTH— TAKE THE FIRST STEP TODAY

HUMAN RESOURCES - WORKPLACE WELLNESS

NOT READY TO QUIT SMOKING?

After learning about what to expect in the quit smoking journey, enhancing awareness of the smoking triggers, withdrawal symptoms and reflecting on other changes that may be taking place in your life, you may have decided not to quit smoking at this time. You may be thinking that the benefits of continuing to smoke outweigh the health risks or you may believe that you currently do not have the willpower and supports to stop smoking. If you are not ready to quit smoking, ask yourself the following questions: What signals will tell you to start thinking about quitting? What beliefs and attitudes do you have about quitting smoking or not quitting smoking? (myhealth.alberta.ca). To help you reflect on these questions, this information sheet explores some of the reasons that may be holding you back and connects you to a simple tool to help gauge your nicotine addiction.

WHY YOU MAY HAVE DECIDED NOT TO QUIT

There are many reasons why people smoke and may decide to continue smoking.

REASON #1 Smoking makes me feel better when I am stressed

People who smoke often say that they feel less stressed after a cigarette, particularly in times of increased stress. What people feel is a decrease in their nicotine withdrawal symptoms and they may also feel less stressed because they have taken some time away from their stressor. Nicotine addiction causes stress; craving for nicotine feels stressful as your body is going through withdrawal. Smoking also increases the heart rate, tightens blood vessels, tenses muscles and allows less oxygen to reach the brain. Smoking should not be viewed as a stress reliever as it does not solve the issue that may be the source of the stress.

Stress is part of life and managing stress is a key part of the quit smoking journey. If you have learned to deal with stress by smoking, it is important to find healthier ways to manage stress before starting the quit journey such as going for a walk, meditating, breathing exercises (taking a few, deep breaths).

REASON #2 Smoking helps me manage my weight

Many individuals who smoke note that smoking is helping with weight loss or weight management. This is partially true as nicotine suppresses appetite and may increase the body's ability to burn calories

(Canadian Cancer Society, 2020). Therefore, one of the fears associated with quitting is weight gain. Although in some cases weight gain does occur after quitting, it is more often related to food being used as a replacement or distraction from smoking and has less to do with the absence of nicotine as an appetite suppressant.

Increased appetite is a common withdrawal symptom after quitting. When you quit smoking, your senses of smell and taste return to normal, making food more enjoyable. At the same time, you may experience that your food likes and dislikes change. Many people report craving sweet and fatty foods which typically have a higher calorie content. You can avoid weight gain by following healthy eating guidelines, taking control of your food choices, managing portions and fighting food cravings with exercise.

REASON #3 My friends all smoke

A person may decide to start/continue smoking because their friends or co-workers smoke and it is a way to fit in or an opportunity to be more social. Quitting smoking does not have to result in losing friends/social circle. If this is preventing you from being ready to quit, take the time to explain to your social circle the reasons for wanting to quit and how they may be of support during the journey. Explore opportunities for creating new non-smoking social experiences such as going for a walk to a public park or hosting a smoke-free board game night. You can be a change agent, what if your decision to quit encourages others in your social circle to quit?



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REASON
#4

Smoking helps me stay alert and energized

One of the reasons it can be hard to give up smoking is the fact that nicotine is a stimulant and may temporarily cause the person to be more alert. In addition, nicotine leads to the release of the feel-good chemical called dopamine making the person more addicted to the feelings of increased energy. However, it is important to remember that smoking reduces the lung function resulting in less oxygen reaching your brain, muscles and other parts of the body. Having less oxygen will make you feel tired and bogged down, therefore, in the long run, quitting smoking will make you more alert and energetic. To prepare for the short-term impact of quitting, think about increasing your level of physical activity to help your body stay alert.

REASON
#5

I am afraid of the challenges associated with quitting

The journey to becoming smoke-free can be challenging and stressful. At this time, you may not be ready to face your triggers, cravings and the many withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, irritability and nausea. Quitting is difficult, but you can enhance your chances of success whenever you are ready, by preparing yourself for the quit journey. Start by identifying your common smoking triggers and strategies to help you cope with the withdrawal symptoms and cravings.

You may also be hesitant to start the journey because you have seen others fail. Remember that on average, a person makes 30 attempts (porcupinehu.on.ca) to quit

smoking. You may be afraid to take the first step because of all the “what ifs” questions such as “what if my withdrawal symptoms are serious?”, “what if I am not able to resist the cravings?”, “what if I fail?”. These questions are normal. Do not hesitate to start the journey because of “what if”; look at the journey as an opportunity to learn about yourself, your smoking patterns, triggers and withdrawal coping mechanisms. Should you slip or fall, what you learn will make any subsequent attempt easier and more successful.

DO YOU KNOW HOW ADDICTED YOU ARE?

Because nicotine is such a powerful drug, quitting smoking might be easier said than done. Enhancing your awareness of how much you depend on nicotine will help you in determining the best strategies to support any future attempts to quit smoking. The questions listed below adapted from the Canadian Cancer Society and quitnow.ca will help you reflect on your level of addiction:

- Do you smoke or feel the urge to smoke within 15 minutes of waking up?
- Do you smoke more in the morning than during the rest of the day?
- Do you find it difficult to go more than 4 hours without smoking?
- Do you smoke more than 15 cigarettes per day?
- Do you get irritable or anxious if you cannot have an opportunity to smoke?
- Do you find it difficult not to smoke in places where smoking is not permitted?

- Do you smoke even if you are so ill that you are in bed?

Interested in learning more about your level of addiction? Go to the [Canadian Pharmacists Association website](#) to take the Fagerstrom Test which measures your level of nicotine addiction. This test can help you make a quit plan that works for you, even if you are not ready to quit now.

Taking the time to think about the reasons why you smoke and to reflect on your nicotine addiction will help you enhance your understanding about the role smoking plays in your life and why it may be so important to you. This along with the information found in the information sheets that are part of the Stop Smoking for Better Health - Take the First Step Today series will help you prepare for the quit journey whenever you are ready.

Quitting smoking can have significant positive effects not only on your health but also on the wellbeing of others around you. For more information, or for a listing of the sources consulted to write this publication, please visit:

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